

NEWS

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SUPERVISORS ADVANCE "HEALTHY CITIES" PROGRAM

The County Board of Supervisors today voted unanimously to support efforts to create a healthier environment and promote healthier lifestyle choices for county and city residents.

In adopting the theme for this year's National Public Health Week, "Designing Healthy Communities: Raising Healthy Kids" the Board directed its Public Health Department to explore ways that San Bernardino and its cities can build healthier communities and raise healthier kids.

"Childhood obesity and asthma are on the rise, and addressing the problem is not something we can do alone," said Eric Frykman, MD, MPH, County Health Officer. The solution, he said, is teamwork. That team so far includes 5th District Supervisor, Josie Gonzales, who, along with local developer Randall Lewis, has taken initial steps to spearhead a coalition of public and business leaders to strategize ways to improve the overall health of our citizens.

As the concept of "Healthy Communities" takes shape, infrastructure to support these collaborative efforts is important, said Dr. Frykman. This program will support and coordinate activities providing technical assistance for city and county planning practices, improved access to health services, and enhanced opportunities for physical fitness in schools and communities.

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Coordination is vital, so community groups, health care agencies, schools, churches, business leaders, plus city and county officials must work together to improve communities' health.

Highlighted are the many challenges that affect our children in their physical, and social environments. It also includes increased access to fresh and healthy foods, improved air and water quality and more opportunities for physical activities to ultimately reduce the rising rates of obesity, diabetes, and asthma.

Communities will consider how buildings, roads, sidewalks and neighborhood design are affecting the health of children. For example, children who live close enough to school to walk, often do not, because the neighborhood does not have sidewalks. Air pollution has contributed to higher rates of childhood asthma, and the lack of access to fresh foods and avenues for activity in some neighborhoods has contributed to rising rates of childhood obesity.

According to the California Health Interview Survey, in 2003, one in four San Bernardino County adolescents 12-17 years of age were overweight or obese. In 2003, only 42 percent of San Bernardino County children 2-11 years of age ate at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily. In 2004, student fitness testing through the California Department of Education indicated that one in three San Bernardino County ninth graders did not meet the fitness standard for body composition, and one in two did not meet the standard for aerobic capacity. Three quarters of ninth graders failed to meet all six fitness standards (aerobic capacity, body composition, abdominal strength, upper body strength, and flexibility).

Dr. Frykman urges county residents to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, and increase physical activity by walking more.

For more information on "Healthy Communities", contact the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health at (800) 782-4264, or visit the website at www.sbcounty.gov/dph.